



### Introduction

On the middle and outer continental shelf of the southeastern United States, areas of moderate- to high-relief live bottom (sponge-coral) reefs and rocky outcrops in depths from 120-200 ft provide habitat for schools of vermillion snapper ("beeliners") that support important commercial and recreational fisheries. Small juveniles can be found on inner-shelf live bottom (60-100 ft), but most fishing takes place on middle-shelf "snapper banks" (120 ft) and shelf-edge "rocky reefs" (180 ft). Managed by federal fishery management agencies as part of the "Snapper-Grouper Complex", vermillion snapper are subject to heavy fishing pressure and considered to be experiencing overfishing.

### Commercial Fishery Harvest

Vermilion snapper support a regional offshore fishery with landings recorded in South Carolina since the late 1970s (Figure 1). These landings in South Carolina have been cyclical, with periods of high and low catches; the highest landings to date were reported in 2001. Prices have been good, with fishermen being paid about \$2.50 per pound in the two most recent years. Landings in South Carolina in 2004 showed a reverse of the decline (2002-2003) since the peak in 2001, and landing in South Carolina were about twice the 43-year average.

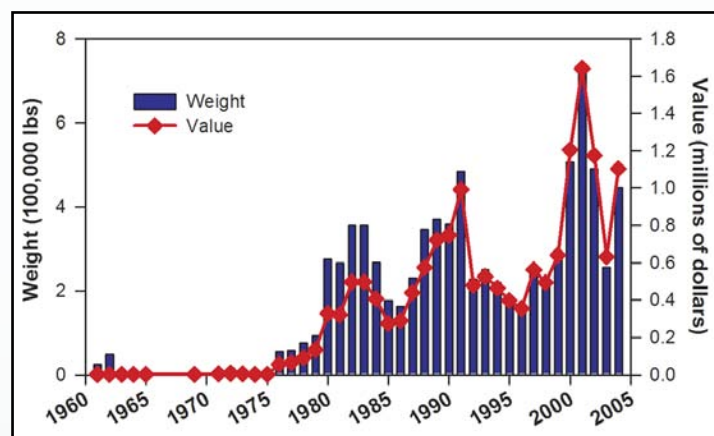


Figure 1. South Carolina commercial vermillion snapper landings in pounds and dollars.

### Recreational Fishery Harvest

Vermilion snapper are a favorite target of head boats (party boats that charge by the head for a full or half day fishing) and other recreational fishing boats on natural reefs, particularly shelf-edge rocky reefs. Although recreational catches of vermillion snapper had a general downward trend since 1982, catches have increased

slightly since the most recent period of low catches in 2002 (Figure 2). Recreational catches landed in South Carolina in 2005 were about twice the 14-year average.

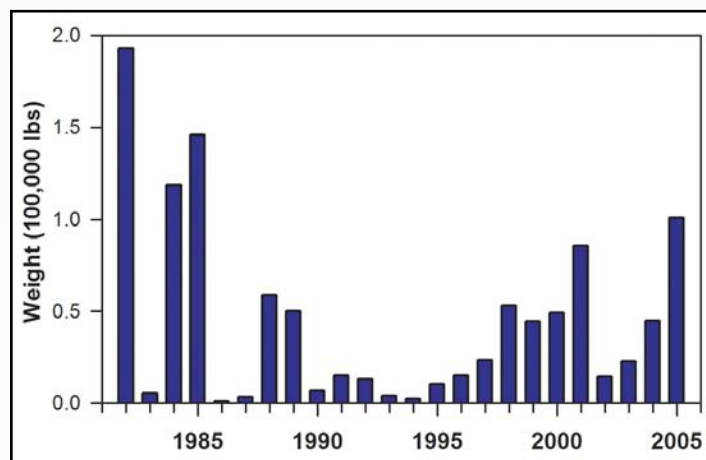


Figure 2. South Carolina recreational vermillion snapper landings in pounds.

### Fishery Independent Sampling

In spite of recent catches being above average, the number of vermillion snapper in MARMAP (Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment and Prediction) fish trap catches have shown a decreasing trend, and have been below the 17-year average since 1997 (Figure 3). Catches in 2005 and other recent years were well below the maximum reported in 1988.

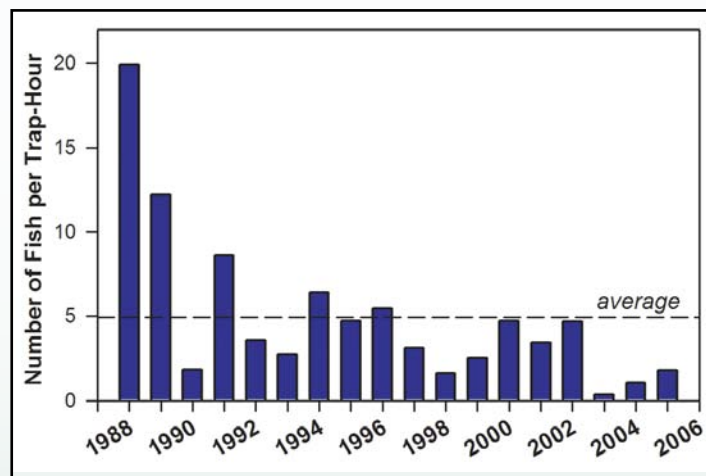
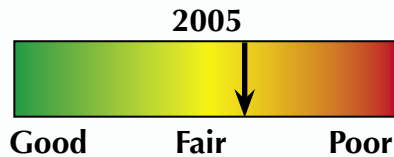


Figure 2. Number of vermillion snapper caught per trap per hour in MARMAP fish trap surveys.

## Overall Condition of the Stock and Status of Management

Vermilion snapper is classified by federal fishery managers as not overfished, but undergoing overfishing. This means that the proportion of the stock taken by a fishery is too high (undergoing overfishing), but that the biomass of the stock is not too low (not overfished). If overfishing is allowed to continue, the stock will become overfished. Therefore, additional regulations on the fishery have been proposed.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has passed regulations to limit the commercial vermillion snapper quota to 1,100,000 lbs gutted weight (1,221,000 lbs whole weight), which is an increase over previously proposed quotas. After the commercial quota is met, all purchase and sale will be prohibited for the rest of the year, and harvest and/or possession would be limited to the recreational bag limit. Additional regulations on the recreational fishery include increasing the minimum size from 11 to 12 inches.



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